

MORNING BUSINESS

PROTECTING STUDENT ATHLETES FROM CONCUSSIONS ACT OF 2021

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, as our students return to in-person instruction, they also will return to school sports. We encourage our students to be active and play school sports to promote healthy habits, team-building skills, and socialization, which are especially important after a year of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet every year, more than 140,000 estimated student athletes sustain a concussion, and that is just the reported count. We can be sure that many more go unreported and untreated.

The health benefits of competing in school sports are undermined if students are staying out on the field after an injury, especially concussions. Unfortunately, many student athletes return to play prematurely, and there is growing evidence that untreated concussions can have detrimental, long term effects on their health and academic performance.

That is why last week I reintroduced the Protecting Student Athletes from Concussions Act. My bill would direct states to develop concussion safety plans for public schools that include a concussion safety awareness component. Certain States, like Illinois, already have such procedures in place, but it is high time we make this true for all States. By equipping our schools and communities with evidence-based guidance for responding to concussions, we can keep our students and their futures safe.

The bill also would require States to adopt a “when in doubt, sit it out” policy. If there is even the possibility that a student athlete has suffered a concussion, their health and safety ought to be the No. 1 priority. That means, if an athlete is suspected of having sustained a concussion, they should sit out and not be allowed to return to play the same day. They should return to play only once evaluated and cleared by a qualified healthcare professional.

Let’s be clear: A concussion is a traumatic brain injury that affects brain function. It is, by no means, something we can simply shake or walk off. Getting your “bell rung,” like they used to say in my day, is a serious threat to a young person. The still-developing brains of students make them more susceptible to injury, making concussions all the more dangerous.

A “when in doubt, sit it out” policy, endorsed by the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Academy of Neurology, will put the decision to return to the game in the hands of qualified healthcare professionals. It will prevent student athletes from experiencing successive injuries by staying in the game when they are not fit. It will give student athletes time to heal and help ensure that short-term symptoms do not become long-term effects.

As we return to in-person instruction, we must use common-sense and evidence-based approaches to ensure student safety. For school sports, this means we have to put the necessary procedures for preventing, detecting, responding to, and treating concussions in place. This bill would help do that.

It is why my bill is endorsed by the American College of Sports Medicine; American Academy of Neurology; National Football League (NFL); National Basketball Association (NBA); Major League Baseball (MLB); National Hockey League (NHL); National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA); American Academy of Sports Physical Therapy; Academy of Neurologic Physical Therapy; American Physical Therapy Association; Easterseals; Illinois High School Association; National Association of School Psychologists; National Association of Secondary School Principals; National Disability Rights Network; National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association; National Parent Teacher Association; Pop Warner Little Scholars; U.S. Soccer Federation; USA Cheer; USA Football; Safe Kids World Wide; and Sports & Fitness Industry Association.

I hope my colleagues will join me in this common-sense, evidence-based approach to protecting student athletes. Thank you.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, yesterday, in a hearing in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Ranking Member Risch, called out the State Department for its apparent lack of action in helping those Americans and Afghan allies who are still stuck in Afghanistan.

It has been 2 months since the withdrawal of all American military and diplomatic presence in the country in the wake of the Taliban’s total takeover of that country.

In the past week or so, the number of Americans reportedly still in the country has grown, not shrunk.

We have gone from around 100 to over 400.

Now, I know Americans are not flocking to Taliban controlled Afghanistan, so why does this number keep going up?

I understand that Americans are not required to register with the State Department so it is understandable that they would not have a reliable, fixed list of Americans at the start of this crisis.

But I find it hard to believe that Americans waited 2 months after being abandoned in Afghanistan by their government to reach out and then, in the space of a week, suddenly found a way to get in touch.

The State Department set up special e-mail addresses and issued guidance on how to report Americans and Afghan allies who need to be evacuated.

My office heard from many Iowans concerned about those they knew in

Afghanistan, and my staff followed the directions from the State Department, forwarding the contact information.

For the most part, all I ever heard back was a confirmation that the message was received.

I am starting to wonder if these went into a black hole?

I did not expect that the State Department would devote time and effort to keeping me informed given that presumably it was all hands on deck to contact those in the country and make arrangements for them.

However, 2 months later, I don’t see much progress.

Then there are reports that efforts by brave former special forces and other Americans who picked up where their government left off to evacuate Americans and Afghan allies have not received the support they needed from the State Department. Is the State Department just washing their hands of this mess?

I shared with Senator Risch information I passed on to the State Department about 98 Afghan allies known to Iowans to need help as their lives were in danger after the Taliban takeover.

I am only aware of one that has been evacuated.

I know that many have not even been contacted by the State Department.

I am glad that Ranking Member Risch entered this information into the RECORD along with information from 24 other Senators, totaling 16,688 cases.

That is just one quarter of the Senate, so I know there are many more cases out there.

It is time to hear what the State Department is doing to get the remaining Americans home and to process the cases of Afghan allies so those who helped us and whose lives are at risk can get to safety.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I was absent for Senate vote No. 447, the vote on the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 471, Beth Robinson, of Vermont, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Second Circuit. I would like the record to reflect that had I been present, I would have voted yes.

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF OSCE’S OFFICE OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the creation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s—OSCE—Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights—ODIHR—one of the world’s most preeminent and comprehensive human rights protection bodies.

In 1990–1991, during the signing of the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe* that created ODIHR, a spirit of “profound change and historic expectations” prevailed among the United States, nations of Europe, and the Soviet Union.